

A Parent's Story 16:

Vix's Story



When your children are placed on child protection, I feel it's like being giving a conviction, but only worse. It was determined that I was unable to protect and safeguard my children. This stays with us for life now.

Wherever we go, I will have to explain what happened or I will be judged. If the kids have an accident and we go to hospital, I will be judged. It is unfair, considering that there was no difference from the 1st time he was released to when he was released again. It was all down to the professionals completing paperwork. Probation didn't want to take responsibility to contact and neither did social services without probations updated risk assessment. It took nine months to close his case as no one would confirm or communicate. All that was needed was a simple call to confirm.

Everything that's happened this time has completely contradicted what happened the first time he was released. I still don't know to this day if they are aware that I personally decided to stop contact, because I'm aware of the risks.

He's been moved back to the night shelter close to where I live, even though he has a job secured in another county, as it's cheaper for them to put him there. They knew his temporary accommodation was only three months, and they've had plenty of time to be able to place him somewhere. It's in their policies and procedures. What do you get when you're around the night shelter? You're around very heavy drug addicts, and it is pushing him back into that circle of offending. As much as that isn't my issue now, if he goes AWOL or messes up, who's going to come banging on my door?

We didn't get contact from his new probation officer until the week before his release, and he didn't find out specifically where he was going until the day before. As far as they were concerned, we were okay to have contact as a family.

Probation did their referral to social services on the basis that our relationship was 'unstable', given the time he'd been away in prison. From the moment that social services stepped in – based on the Oasis Reports that were just copied and pasted – they determined him 'high-risk'. I was put through it as a parent – restrictions were put in place straight away. We were only allowed supervised contact.

His day to be released from his hostel was the 1st of January, which was odd in itself because everyone was on annual leave. He had his bags packed, but then his key worker came in and told him his stay had been extended. I noticed a difference in his behaviour so I told him to pull his socks up – I was getting the brunt of it from social services, because it

all comes back down on the parent's shoulders regardless of if they've done anything wrong.

On the 7th of January, he was on a video-call and he was panicking. 'There's a riot van outside, I think I'm getting recalled' he told me. He said he hadn't done anything however, so I told him not to worry. There was then a bang on the door. Officers came in and informed him he'd been recalled. Their reasons for recall were mingling in each other's rooms, even though they were house-sharing and allowed to eat together. Two of the others in the hostel had failed a drugs test, and because of his deemed association he was recalled too.

Probation didn't take up a very active role in the situation. They turned up to two or three meetings. In April they still hadn't done an updated risk assessment. I luckily found a really good solicitor, who really hammered them. She directed me to writing a complaint to HMPPS – to highlight the failures of their policies and procedures.

The response I got back blamed me and tore me apart. They determined me an 'irresponsible parent' in response to my complaint. They stated 'social services determined that you could not be seen as a responsible adult' and that 'it was agreed that the children could see their father in the presence of a responsible adult.' There was nothing to determine that, they hadn't turned up to any of the meetings, they had just picked out certain aspects of the original report. Reasons for stopping contact were due to domestic violence in previous relationships. Social services are very clever with the way they word and write things. Everyone read that as being domestic violence between us, and I couldn't correct them because I wasn't receiving these reports myself. There's no support, no engagement, not even checking to see what's happening.

Social services are there to safeguard and protect children. Probation are there to safeguard and protect the public. Those two services should be integrated where there's a family with a member in prison. And that's where it's lacking any support. Going from my experience and thinking of others, an agency needs to be put in place to support the family. Ask the right questions, get them to do courses, see how the children are impacted. Monitor the contact. They should check in frequently during the sentence, not just once, at the end.

The first probation officer did his Oasis Report for a three-and-a-half-year sentence over a 10 minute phone call. She put down as a 'risk factor' that he had requested to do a 'better relationships course.' Something that I had in fact requested. The probation worker simply couldn't get her head around why he would want to do that, and it was used against us.

In the Oasis Report, the probation officer stated they did not want for him to have to rely on me. Despite this, they have done nothing to support him. He had no ID, bank account, or housing to move into. This should have been done and put in place before his release. Especially since we were living through a pandemic. They also stated he was not actively seeking work, even though this was during lockdown. People were being let go and job centres were closing. When we were chasing up over Christmas as to where he was

going onto, his probation officer said for me to get on to it as I seemed 'proactive.' I had no clue what I was doing or how to support him as he was staying in a different county. It took me two hours to find out and did end up getting some really good advice. Isn't that the role of probation?

One of the new probation officers, when she turned up, told me that he wasn't a risk to his children, and that she couldn't understand why these restrictions were in place. However that was just her word, and for some reason they don't go by the words. They go by the documents that are filled out in prison and afterwards, and copied and pasted from the previous probation officer. Things become facts, even if they aren't necessarily facts.

He was deemed to be a risk to me because of an argument he'd had with a previous partner. One phone call to the police. No charges, no arrests. Because I had called the police and got an order for a previously violent partner, because I had done everything that social services would have told me to do, that was printed out and brought up at the conference. That was why I was determined vulnerable.

I asked if the social worker could come see how he is with the children – they said no. You can't go by somebody else's piece of paper. Those children have rights, the basic human right to see their own family. It was so inconsistent too. My children were having people come into the house every two weeks, in masks, asking them to go with them alone into their bedroom. You're asking me to normalise my children going into their bedroom with a strange adult. It's a systemic issue, both systems don't function together.

As much as I know my children, what the play therapy with Children Heard and Seen (CHAS) got out of my son allowed me to understand what he was processing much easier. I had CHAS to be able to provide that, but there are thousands of children who are unaware. People are scared. I was scared of reaching out and asking for support. I was very wary when I got involved. A lot of families know how the system works, and they will just not engage.

We are not together now, but I feel I hold a conviction because I tried to be a family. I had already done everything and more than what was expected of me to prove my abilities to safeguard myself and the children. It was not taken into consideration.

Everything comes down on the non-offending partners shoulders. I was dragged through the mud. It affected my mental health, which they were aware of and offered no support. When you are told your children could possibly be taken away it was like my soul was being ripped out. Yet when restrictions were set in place, they didn't offer any support for the children. I was left to support them through their grief.